

THE ECONOMICS OF PERFORATING STAMPS

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When reading about perfins, the dominant name which occurs is that of Joseph Sloper of London who invented and patented the process of perforating initials, etc, into documents as a means of indelibly marking them, and then extended his patent to include perforating postage stamps. Joseph Sloper's company made many thousands of perforator dies as shown in the company's Workshop Impression Books. While most of the company's early business from the mid-1800s consisted of producing individual perforating devices, they later introduced a service for providing clients with perforated stamps whereby the client only had to pay for the cost of the stamps and a charge for perforating them. In order that they could provide this latter service, they were required to become accredited by the Post Office. So, Joseph Sloper and others who provided a similar perforating service in England became licensed as "sub-postmasters". Whereas Sloper's business was solely associated with perforators, these other sub-postmasters did it as a secondary source of income to their main line of business as printers, a chemist, etc.

These sub-postmasters were paid "poundage" by the Post Office on the stamps they sold, and added various charges for the perforating. One sub-postmaster advertised that he would not charge at all for the perforating, presumably in an attempt to gain more clients. The poundage and perforating charges have been recorded in files of the British Post Office, and recently members of the Great Britain Perfin Society have researched these archived files. In 1905, the poundage paid was at a base rate of 1% of the value of the stamps sold, but on a sliding scale and up to a maximum of £400 per year [1].

When Joseph Sloper died in 1890, his youngest sons, Percy and Eustace, took over the running of the business, with Eustace dying in 1903. Joseph's eldest two sons Joseph Lavell Leete Sloper and Horace Sloper, had predeceased him and the other son, Frank, did not work in the family business. The economic progress of this family business can perhaps be measured by the value of the estates of several family members in succession as shown in the table below.

Estates of Sloper Family Members

<u>Will of</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>	<u>Probate granted to</u>	<u>Value of estate</u>
Joseph Sloper	18 Jun 1890	Sarah Lavell Sloper (Joseph's widow)	£163 4s 1d
Sarah Lavell Sloper	27 May 1892	Percy Sloper & Ellen Sloper (children)	£1,165 0s 3d
Eli Green (husband of Joseph & Sarah's daughter Fanny Jane) Stone quarry proprietor	9 Aug 1899	Fanny Green (nee Sloper), Percy Sloper & Eustace Sloper	£6,634 7s 2d
Eustace Sloper	6 Sep 1903	Alice Knight (nee Sloper, daughter of Joseph & Sarah) and her husband Francis Knight, minister of religion	£6,527 17s 7d
Frank Sloper	1 Mar 1904	Percy Sloper	£5
Alice Knight (nee Sloper)	19 Aug 1918	Francis Knight, her husband	£1,537 3s 6d
Ellen Sloper	8 Oct 1926	Percy Sloper	£2,538 8s 7d
Percy Sloper	19 Mar 1933	An accountant and a company director (estate left to charities)	£15,663 9s 6d
Fanny Green	29 Apr 1933	A Solicitor and a retired Secretary	£647 17s 4d